

U.S. Concerned Over Missile That Sank Elath

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 10—The sinking of the Israeli destroyer Elath last October by Soviet-made ship-to-ship missiles set off an examination of United States Navy defenses against such weapons, Navy sources said today.

The study has found that no acceleration of current defense plans is necessary, the sources said. But despite this they emphasized that the missiles are a serious potential threat to Navy destroyers and cruisers that bombard the coast of North Vietnam.

The sinking of the Elath off the mouth of the Suez Canal Oct. 21 has also focused attention at senior levels within the Navy and the Defense Department on the importance of defenses against antiship missiles, the sources said.

Incident Aroused Concern

The Elath was struck by three missiles that travel at a speed slower than sound and are called the Styx by the Western allies. The missiles, each of which carries a high-explosive warhead weighing a thousand pounds, were fired from an Egyptian missile-launching boat in Port Said harbor. The boat is also made in the Soviet Union.

The incident aroused considerable concern in Washington over the danger to American warships off North Vietnam if the Soviet Union gave such weapons to the North Vietnamese. The Styx has a range of 15 to 20 miles.

Although there is as yet no evidence that North Vietnam possesses the Styx, American and Australian destroyers and cruisers on the so-called Sea

After Study, Officials Stress Soviet Weapon Could Peril Warships Off Vietnam

Dragon patrol along the North Vietnamese coast were operating even prior to the Elath incident on the assumption of a potential threat from Styx missiles, the sources said.

Some officers are convinced that the Russians will eventually supply the North Vietnamese with Styx missiles, possibly after the battleship New Jersey is sent to Vietnam next fall.

Navy Would Attack Them

The coast of North Vietnam is kept under constant aerial surveillance to detect signs that any missile-launching installations are being constructed or to locate any truck-drawn, mobile launchers.

If such installations or launchers are found, the Navy intends to attack them. Air cover is being provided to the Sea Dragon patrol force to meet any such eventuality.

The patrol force normally consists of three destroyers and a cruiser. They attack North Vietnamese supply craft and bombard truck convoys, radar sites and other targets along the coastline.

Electronic countermeasures

are the second line of defense against the Styx, the sources said.

These are highly classified techniques that officers are reluctant to discuss, but they involve means to detect and confuse the radar used to launch the missile and then to deceive the missile itself, after it has been fired, by the emission of electronic impulses from equipment carried by the destroyers and cruisers.

To fire the Styx, the launching crew must first locate the target ship on radar and then set the missile's autopilot to guide the weapon toward the vessel. Once the Styx gets close to the target, a homing device within the missile detects the ships and brings the missile to its final destination.

All destroyers and cruisers going to Vietnam are being equipped with such electronic countermeasure devices, the sources said.

The ships, guns and anti-aircraft missiles are the third and final defense against the Styx, the sources said.

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